

A Voice



Ebony Bradford (left) of Fort Knox, Ky., briefs Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki (right) about the Army Teen Panel newsletter, The Voice, as Chris Hansen looks on.

**Story and Photos by
Harriet E. Rice**

to Army Teens

"SPRING into Action" was the theme for Army Teen Panel members who gathered in Alexandria, Va., in February to discuss issues

affecting teenagers. And before they departed for the installations they represented Armywide, they had done just that, developing a plan they hoped would positively affect their peers and briefing it up the chain of command to Army Chief of Staff GEN Eric K. Shinseki.

The plan called for teen panels at major Army command level, a brochure to help installations implement youth-

sponsorship programs, a commemorative coin, mass distribution of "The Voice" newsletter and an appeal to Shinseki to lend his name to an e-mail message supporting the teens' initiatives.



Army Teen Panel member Alexander Burgos from Fort Richardson, Alaska, consults his notes during his presentation.

This ATP group first met in June 1999, said P.K. Tomlinson, a senior staff advisor from the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center in Alexandria, Va. "They're now meeting to look at the successes of the past six months and what needs to be accomplished."

Looking at the successes, Kamaria Black, of Fort Campbell, Ky., reported that her installation commander turned over an unused NCO club to teens and provided \$400,000 for its renovation. A U.S. Army Pacific Command teen,

Army Teen Panel was established in 1994 to foster communication between teenagers and Army leaders on issues facing young people in today's society.

Teens who are in good standing in their communities and have volunteered in their local youth services program are eligible to apply for selection to a two-year term.

Ashley Bianchi, announced the opening of a teen center at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and the start of a program for middle schoolers.

But other teens expressed concerns about staff indifference to the Army Family Action Plan process, program inequities from post to post, bureaucratic policy interpretations and the need for their own space.

All agreed that the major problem is communicating with other teens, both on their own installations and on other installations in the MACOMs they represent. They also agreed that the MACOM youth services staff is a key link in the communication chain.

After their initial session the teens organized themselves into committees, each responsible for one of three key areas: media and marketing, governing

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Honors From a New Generation

It was a solemn moment for the 10 teenagers. Four of them waited at the top of the steps leading to the Tomb of the Unknowns. The others stood in the roped-off area with other onlookers, watching the changing of the guard.

Ten minutes later, the staff sergeant who was commander of the relief instructed the four teens briefly. Then a member of The Old Guard announced the wreath-laying ceremony about to be conducted by the Army Teen Panel. The four teens walked down the steps accompanied by the ramrod-straight staff sergeant.

As another Old Guard soldier placed the wreath of red, white and blue silk flowers on a white easel, two teens stepped forward, placed their hands on the wreath and moved with the soldier as he positioned it — complete with white teddy bear — in front of the white-marble tomb.

All stood at attention while a bugler sounded “Taps,” the notes rising mournfully into the fog that shrouded the surrounding hillsides overlooking the Potomac River. The moment passed. But it is a moment — a memory — the young people will carry with them for life.

A wreath-making project, and the wreath-laying ceremony, were part of the Feb. 24 to 27 meeting of the Army Teen Panel — teen representatives who are the voice for Army youth worldwide. Now in its sixth year, the panel is a communication bridge between Army teens and Army leaders, giving members an opportunity to voice issues and concerns on behalf of young people as they take on the challenges of Army life.

“Our wreath-laying project reflects the core values the Army believes in; this is the teens’ expression of honoring those values,” explained Penny Schneider, director of Children and Youth programs for the Military District of Washington, which hosted the meeting. “The teens decided they would do this. The last time they were in town, MDW commander MG Robert R.

Ivany offered to help arrange a time for them to conduct the ceremony.

Since we had to provide a suitable wreath, we decided to let the teens create their own so it would really be their unique expression.”

“The ceremony made me feel really special,” said Alexander Burgos, who traveled from Fort Richardson, Alaska, to participate. “To me, it’s a great honor to be one of the four teens to put a wreath at the Tomb, and I’m proud to be a part of it.” — *Harriet E. Rice*



Four members of the Army Teen Panel placed a special wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery as an expression of teens’ support for the belief in the Army’s core values.



documents and Youth Sponsorship. In two-and-a-half days, committee members

worked their issues, prepared briefings and heard guidance on proper protocol for presenting their issues to the general officers they would brief.

The teens then briefed Military District of Washington commander MG Robert R. Ivany and his wife, Marianne; CFSC commander BG Craig B. Whelden; CFSC chief of Child and Youth Services M.A. Lucas; and John Novak, MDW chief of Morale, Welfare and Recreation.

When Ivany asked the group members the one thing they’d like

implemented that would assist the Army Teen Panel in reaching its goals, the unanimous response was MACOM teen panels.

The teens then met with Shinseki, his wife, Patty, and members of Shinseki’s staff to get his support for the plan.

“We care deeply about you,” Shinseki said in agreeing to send a message to commanders in the field. “You are very important to the Army leadership.”

“Teens are our future,” said Patty Shinseki. “That’s why I feel it’s so important to hear their priorities. Their ideas are very intelligent and well thought out.” □



Fort Belvoir’s Tamara Lostan explains to Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki how the Army Teen Panel will collect information about installation youth programs in preparation for the July Department of defense Youth Congress.

For more information on becoming an Army Teen Panel member, visit your local morale, welfare and recreation office or log on to the ATP website at www.redstone.army.mil/armyyouth.

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